

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

NORTHEAST ORGANIC FARMING
ASSOCIATION OF NEW YORK,
NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE
COUNCIL, and ENVIRONMENTAL
WORKING GROUP,

Plaintiffs,

v.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,

Defendant.

Civil Action No. 1:25-cv-01529
(MMG)

DECLARATION OF MARCIE CRAIG

I, Marcie Craig, hereby declare and state as follows:

1. I am the Executive Director of the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York (“NOFA-NY”). I am over the age of eighteen. I have personal knowledge of the facts stated in this declaration, and, if called to testify, I could and would competently do so under oath.

2. NOFA-NY is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization of farmers, gardeners, and consumers working together to create a sustainable regional food system that’s ecologically sound, socially just, and economically viable. Through demonstration and education, NOFA-NY promotes land stewardship, organic food production, and local marketing. NOFA-NY is New York’s leading organization providing effective programs and services that promote sustainable, local, organic food and farming.

3. I have worked at NOFA-NY since 2023. In my capacity as Executive Director, I oversee nine staff members who provide technical assistance to farmers, carry out education

programs, and advocate for local, state, and federal policies that support and protect organic and climate-smart farming.

4. One way in which we further our mission is by providing technical assistance to hundreds of farmers each year, supporting and guiding them through the process of implementing organic and climate-smart agricultural practices. A core aspect of this work is NOFA-NY's free telephone hotline, the Farmer Helpline, where staff members answer farmers' questions about how to implement various agricultural practices, how to navigate U.S. Department of Agriculture ("USDA") programs that help farmers finance the adoption of those practices, and how to access relevant digital resources, including on USDA webpages.

5. NOFA-NY also furthers its mission through educational events. These include free workshops and on-farm field days that impart practical strategies for strengthening farms' business operations, advancing their adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices, and improving their capacity to identify and manage climate-change-related risks and vulnerabilities. In 2024 alone, nearly 2,000 people attended NOFA-NY's educational events.

6. In addition, NOFA-NY furthers its mission by advancing policies that support sustainable and climate-smart farming. Given the grave threats to the food system posed by recent actions—including freezing hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for USDA programs and firing thousands of staff who administered those programs—NOFA-NY's policy advocacy has recently, and urgently, focused on protecting and restoring USDA programs, funding, and capacity. This advocacy includes campaigns aimed at quickly and effectively educating members of the public about the importance of imperiled USDA programs and urging them to contact their representatives in Congress. This advocacy is of existential importance to NOFA-NY, as most of its funding comes from USDA programs that are currently frozen. This freeze threatens to

significantly reduce NOFA-NY's capacity to provide critical services to farmers, depriving them of resources for navigating a complex regulatory and economic landscape. Indeed, as a direct result of the funding freeze, earlier this month, I was forced to lay off one of NOFA-NY's handful of technical assistance providers, who provide invaluable, one-on-one support to farmers as they select and implement climate-smart agricultural practices. If the funding freeze persists, I will be forced to lay off additional technical assistance staff. Put simply, NOFA-NY's future—and the future of the farming community it supports—depends on convincing decisionmakers to restore and protect USDA programs.

7. Climate-change-focused USDA webpages have been, and will continue to be, essential to NOFA-NY's technical assistance services, educational programs, and policy advocacy.

8. NOFA-NY's technical assistance staff, for example, have frequently directed farmers to Farm Service Agency ("FSA") and Farmers.gov webpages when fielding inquiries through the Farmer Helpline about how to finance projects to make farm operations more sustainable and climate resilient. For example, farmers have called with questions about how to implement rotational grazing, a livestock management practice that can improve soil health and prevent degradation of grazing lands. Adopting this practice often requires farmers to make improvements to their farms, such as erecting cross fencing and installing water pipelines. Farmers have also routinely asked NOFA-NY staff about how to finance the implementation of conservation practices like cover cropping, no-till farming, and planting hedgerows, including how to afford necessary equipment purchases. When answering these questions, NOFA-NY staff have, as a matter of course, directed farmers to USDA webpages with detailed information about financing options, including USDA's farm loan programs.

9. Since January 31, 2025, however, multiple FSA and Farmers.gov webpages about financing climate-smart agriculture practices through farm loan programs have become unavailable, depriving me and my staff of key resources we need to explain how farm loan programs work, how much financing farmers can access through various loan programs, and which climate-smart activities and equipment purchases can be financed through different loan programs. My staff are acutely affected by the loss of these digital resources at this time of year, as they are currently advising farmers on planting and operational decisions that must be made before the warmer months arrive.

10. The harm caused by losing these resources is compounded by the chaos wrought by USDA's recent staff firings, which have eliminated hundreds of loan analysts and grant administrators with whom farmers could have previously interfaced. Now more than ever, farmers are relying on NOFA-NY staff to point them to complete and user-friendly digital resources about financing improvements for the coming year. Losing access to FSA and Farmers.gov webpages has made it significantly harder for us to serve as reliable liaisons between farmers and federal resources at this critical juncture.

11. USDA's unexplained changes to its websites have also significantly undermined our ability to trust that USDA digital resources are up-to-date and accurate. When attempting to provide timely assistance to farmers, NOFA-NY staff now routinely encounter broken links and "access denied" or "archived" messages on USDA webpages. This frequent occurrence has quickly deteriorated our staff's confidence in the reliability of information on USDA webpages, which damages their ability to help farmers make time-sensitive and financially significant decisions in reliance on USDA digital resources.

12. USDA webpages have also been key to NOFA-NY's educational activities. For instance, when helping farmers develop strategies for managing the effects of climate change, NOFA-NY educators have relied on and directed farmers to USDA webpages that served as central repositories of climate-change-related resources and tools. One such webpage, USDA's "Climate Solutions" landing page, was especially useful to NOFA-NY educators, as it provided a comprehensive survey of USDA climate-change-focused programs and linked to funding opportunities and interactive tools that farmers could use to mitigate and manage the effects of climate change. Since realizing that USDA unpublished this webpage on January 31, 2025, NOFA-NY educators have expended valuable time attempting to reassemble USDA resources that were previously available in a single, centralized location, delaying NOFA-NY's ability to provide other services.

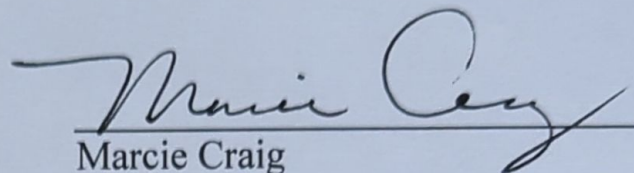
13. Additional webpages we rely on for our educational programming are at risk of imminent removal. I understand that on January 30, 2025, USDA issued a directive ordering staff to archive or unpublish climate-change-focused webpages. Many webpages we still rely on fall within that definition. For instance, when imparting strategies for identifying and managing climate-change-related vulnerabilities, NOFA-NY educators routinely direct farmers to region-specific vulnerability assessments on USDA's Climate Hubs website which, at least for now, remains live. The removal of these assessments would hinder NOFA-NY's ability to provide farmers with reliable, science-based information about Northeast-specific vulnerabilities, including hazards to common perennial crops and livestock, as well as strategies to protect local farms from extreme weather.

14. USDA's removal of climate-change-focused webpages also hurts NOFA-NY's ongoing efforts to ensure that USDA fulfills its existing funding obligations, including to NOFA-

NY. We receive funding from USDA programs, including the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, to carry out many of our financial and technical services. Despite promising farmers that USDA funding would not be frozen, and notwithstanding contrary court orders preliminarily enjoining the Trump Administration's "funding freeze," USDA has recently halted disbursements to Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities grantees, thus imperiling our ability to continue providing services to local farmers, including by forcing us to lay off crucial technical assistance staff. At the same time, USDA has unpublished its landing page about the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, purging its website of background information about the program, making it nearly impossible to find information about the program's efficacy and administration, including an interactive map that demonstrates the program's benefits to farmers across the country. USDA has also made official videos about the program unavailable, including a video previously published on the official USDA YouTube page that provided an in-depth overview of the program.

15. By removing this and other content, USDA has deprived NOFA-NY of public information it could have used—at a critical moment of intense national debate—to educate the public and members of Congress about the importance of defending USDA programs and restoring promised funds. Without direct access to the full scope of public information about at-risk USDA programs, including USDA webpages that illustrate the efficacy and importance of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities, effective communication with members of Congress and other decisionmakers is much more challenging. Our inability to access these resources thwarts our ability to advocate for ourselves and to participate in public discourse about USDA's programming, funding, and staffing.

I declare under penalty of perjury that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing is true and correct. Executed this 14th day of March, 2025.


Marcie Craig